The English Clergy and the Hundred Years War | Studies in Church History | Cambridge Core

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Extract

The Contribution made by the Church to the English war effort during the Hundred Years War was immense. It is the purpose of this paper to describe the forms which this contribution took, and then to offer some reflections on it.

The most important clerical contribution to the war was financial: the taxes voted by the clergy in their two convocations and collected by themselves for the benefit of the crown. These corresponded to the lay subsidies voted in parliament. Normally such taxes were tenths of clerical income as it had been assessed, about 1291, for the benefit of the papacy. No new assessment of clerical wealth was made in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, but during the decade 1371 to 1381 a series of experimental taxes was levied from clergy and laity alike. These experiments, culminating in the notorious poll tax of 1380–1 which provoked open rebellion, were not repeated. But in the fifteenth century successive governments tried to tap the wealth of the chantry and stipendiary chaplains through a series of taxes of the poll tax type. Unlike the fourteenth-century poll taxes these measures were imposed at infrequent intervals (in 1406, 1419, 1430, 1436, 1449), but, like them, were abandoned because they failed to bring in the hoped-for revenue.

References

[1] *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae Auctoritate P. Nicholai IV circa A.D. 1291* (London 1802).

[2] For the clergy these experimental taxes were.’ 1371, grant of £50,000; 1377, poll tax; 1379, subsidy proportionate to wealth; 1380-1, poll tax.

[3] For lists of grants made by the two convocations during the fourteenth century see Weske, D.B., The Convocation of the Clergy (London 1937)Google Scholar Appendices A and B. For the fifteenth century recourse must be had to the *Calendars of Fine Rolls.*

[4] McKisack, M., The Fourteenth Century (Oxford 1959) p 287.Google Scholar

[5] London, PRO, E359/15, Enrolled Accounts (Clerical Subsidies), which covers the period 1370-98.

[6] E.g., *CPR 1401-5* pp 223, 250, 318.

[7] PRO, E359 gives information about all collectors of tenths and their attorneys.

[8] The process of collection is described by Lunt, W.E., 'The Collectors of clerical subsidies granted to the king by the English Clergy', in The English Government at Work, ed Morris, W.A. and Strayer, J.R. (Cambridge, Mass. 1947) II 227–80 Google Scholar. The collectors were allowed to claim their expenses at the exchequer and these sums, which varied widely on different occasions, are recorded on the Enrolled Accounts.

[9] See, e.g. *CPR 1385-9* pp 281, 423; *CPR 1391-6* pp 304, 603.

[10] In the spring of 1381 a collector of the clerical poll tax was beaten up in the deanery of Bicester, Oxon., L[incolnshire] A[rchives] O[ffice], Reg[ister] 12 [(Register of John Buckingham, Memoranda)] fol 226.

[11] Life exemption from being made a tax collector was granted to the abbot of Croxton Kerrial (Leics.), at the instance of the earl of Nottingham, on 7 Nov. 1385, to the abbot and convent of Garendon (Leics.) for sixty years on 31 March 1386, and to John Thorpe abbot of Wellow (Lines.) for life on 12 Sept. 1388, *CPR 1385-9* pp 45, 123, 506.

[12] See Morgan, Marjorie, The English Lands of the Abbey of Bec (Oxford 1946), and Matthew, Donald, The Norman Monasteries and their English Possessions (Oxford

1962).Google Scholar

[13] Commissions to farm the alien priories are to be found in the *Calendars of Fine Rolls.*

[14] Morgan, Marjorie, 'The Suppression of the Alien Priories' History 26 (1941) pp 204–12 Google Scholar, and McHardy, A.K., 'The Alien Priories and the Expulsion of Aliens from England in 1378' SCH 12 pp 133–41.Google Scholar

[15] It has been calculated that 1,600 presentations were made by the Crown to benefices in the gift of alien priories in England and Wales, when in the king's hand, between 1349 and 1378, J.R.L. Highfield, 'The Relations between the Church and the English Crown from the death of Archbishop Stratford to the Opening of the Great Schism' (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1951) p 190.

[16] In the parliament which sat from 24 Feb. to 29 March 1371 the council asked for a grant of £100,000 making it clear that half was to come from the clergy, *The Anonimalle Chronicle* ed V.H. Galbraith (Manchester 1927) p 67.

[17] The value of clerical organisation and leadership was shown in a most spectacular way at the battle of Neville's Cross, near Durham in 1346.

[18] For bishops as organisers of local defence see H.J. Hewitt, *The Organisation of War Under Edward III, 1338-62* (Manchester 1966) pp 11, 13. Examples of commissions to heads of religious houses to organise defence even in a period of nominal peace can be found in *CPR 1405-8* pp 303, 306.

[19] This subject has been discussed by [Bruce] McNab, ['Obligations of the Church in English Society:] Military Arrays [of the Clergy, 1369-1418', in *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer* ed W. C. Jordan, B. McNab and T.R. Ruiz (Princeton N.J. 1976) pp 293-314.] The three paragraphs which follow are based on this article except where otherwise stated.

[20] Stubbs, William, Selea Charters and other Illustrations of English Constitutional History 9th ed, rev Davis, H.W.C. (Oxford 1870) pp 464–6.Google Scholar

[21] McNab, ‘Military Arrays’ p 293.

[22] LAO Reg. 12 fols 70^{v}, 77^{v}.

[23] Cambridge, Gonville and Caius MS. 588/737 fols 85^{v}-86.

[24] E.G., Rochester and Llandaff in 1415, McNab, ‘Military Arrays’ p 303.

[25] *Ibid* pp 300, 302; LAO Reg. 12 fol 153^{v}.

[26] *Ibid* fols 77^{v}-78^{v}.

[27] Aston, M.E., ‘The Impeachment of Bishop Despenser’ BIHR 38 (1965) pp 127-48Google Scholar for a full account with references.

[28] Prince, A.E., ‘The Payment of Army Wages in Edward Ill’s Reign’ Speculum 19 (1944) pp 137–60 CrossRefGoogle Scholar; Tout, T.F., Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England (Manchester 1920–33) esp. Vol. IV chap. XIV.Google Scholar

[29] Hewitt, H.J., The Black Prince’s Expedition of 1355-1357 (Manchester 1958) pp 17, 84Google Scholar. Richard Courtenay (bishop of Norwich from 1413) accompanied Prince Henry on his expedition against the Welsh in 1407, and later joined Henry, then king, on his invasion of Normandy, and died of dysentery during the siege of Harfleur, Emden (O) 1 p50b.

[30] Hewitt, H.J., The Organisation of War Under Edward 111, 1338-62 (Manchester 1966) pp 160–4 Google Scholar; Jones, W.R., ‘The English Church and Royal Propaganda During the Hundred Years War’ Journal of British Studies 19 (1979) pp 18–30 Google Scholar; McHardy, A.K. in SCH 18 (1982) pp 215–27.Google Scholar

[31] V.J. Scattergood, *Politics and Poetry in the Fifteenth Century* (London 1971) pp 222-3 quoting from Hoccleve’s Regement of Princes.

[32] *The Vision of Piers Plowman, passus* X 11 364-71 (The version used here is the translation by Terence Tiller, London 1981, which in general follows the B text).

[33] Both, though in orders, were married; Hoccleve after a long wait for promotion which never materialised.

[34] *Heresy Trials [in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31]* ed [Norman P.] Tanner [(Camden Society, Fourth Series 20, 1977)] pp 71, 142; A.K. McHardy in *SCH* 9 pp 132-3.

[35] Orme, Nicholas, English Schools in the Middle Ages (London 1973) pp 320–1, 197.Google Scholar

[36] Gabel, Leona C., Benefit of Clergy in England in the Later Middle Ages (Smith College Studies in History XIV no. 1-4, 1928-9) pp 76–84.Google Scholar

[37] *Handbook of British Chronology* edd F.M. Powicke and E. B. Fryde (2 edn London 1961) pp 84, 101.

[38] Storey, R.L., 'Gentleman-bureaucrats', in Profession, Vocation, and Culture in Later Medieval England: Essays dedicated to the memory of Myers, A.R. ed Clough, Cecil H. (Liverpool 1982) pp 90–109.Google Scholar

[39] *Ibid* pp 98-102.

[40] Eton College Register 1, fols 56^{v}, 57^{v} for an example of a parish clerk who was married and had a daughter.

[41] *SCH* 9 pp 131-45; *Heresy Trials* ed Tanner, *passim* and J. A. F. Thomson, *The Later Lollards* (2 edn Oxford 1967) *passim.*

[42] In the surviving poll tax assessment of 1377-81 even unbeneficed chaplains are described as 'dominus': PRO, E179 (and sub-numbers) *passim.*

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